

Maidstone Borough Council

Empty Homes Policy

2026-2028

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Our Corporate Strategy (2025-2035) identifies the Council's aim "to make Maidstone a place people can be proud of, where they feel they belong, where they feel safe and where the rights of nature and people are respected". The strategy gives four priorities, one of which is Quality Homes for all. One of the outcomes of which is "improved quality of accommodation with a particular importance placed on minimising the number of empty homes".
- 1.2 This policy provides in greater detail, our priorities and how we intend to accomplish them. It also details to local Councillors, local residents, and our stakeholders how we will work to bring back into use privately owned empty homes.
- 1.3 This policy sets out 3 key methods the Council will use to support empty homes being brought back into use across the borough. These are:
- a) Identification and engagement,
 - b) Advice and incentives, and
 - c) Enforcement action.

2.0 Why do homes become empty?

- 2.1 Homes become empty for a variety of reasons, with many routinely becoming empty as an inevitable consequence of being sold and are soon re-occupied. Other homes however, become and remain empty for a wide range of reasons, including:
- a) the owner is unable to organise extensive building works;
 - b) the property is subject to probate;
 - c) the owner has moved into a nursing home, residential care, or other supported housing;
 - d) the property is subject to redevelopment proposals;
 - e) the owner has moved away or abroad;
 - f) the owner is unaware of how to bring the home back into use;
 - g) the owner perceives that renting to tenants is not appropriate, and;
 - h) the owner is waiting for an increase in capital value.

3.0 Why bring empty homes back into use?

- 3.1 Homes that lie empty and unoccupied are clearly a wasted resource. This is especially the case given the current high demand for all forms of housing and the impact on households who are unable to locate appropriate housing for their needs.
- 3.2 Empty homes can also place a burden on local neighbourhoods and reduce pride in homes and place through:
- a) detracting from the visual amenity of the local area;
 - b) encouraging vandalism and anti-social behaviour etc;
 - c) attracting vermin or subject to fly-tipping;
 - d) creating concerns for immediate neighbours due to lack of general maintenance and disrepair; and
 - e) being targeted by squatters.

3.3 Empty properties can also be attributed to fuelling a 'spiral of decline' in a local area where a sense of neglect discourages inward investment and new households are dissuaded from moving into the neighbourhood, whether they are seeking to rent or own a home.

3.4 Reducing the time a property is left empty will consequently also reduce the risk that it will become dilapidated and an eyesore. Any reduction in the time the property is left empty helps to increase the supply of housing.

4.0 Council Tax Premiums

4.1 The Council Tax Department charge extra premiums on top of the normal council tax charge to encourage owners of empty homes to take action to return the home back into use or to sell it. The premium is an extra 100% Council Tax charge on properties empty for more than 12 months, an extra 200% on properties empty for more than five years; and 300% on properties empty for more than ten years.

4.2 If the property is furnished and not the owner's main home, it is considered a second home, and these properties are now (from April 2025) charged a second home premium of 100%.

4.3 For more information on the relevant premiums, please visit <https://maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/council-tax/empty-and-second-homes>

5.0 No Use Empty Initiative

5.1 We work in partnership with the No Use Empty Initiative to reduce the number of empty properties. The initiative allows empty property owners to obtain capital funding to sell or let their empty property by providing loans.

5.2 Where appropriate we will refer owners of empty properties to the No Use Empty Initiative so a loan can be applied for.

6.0 Targeted interventions

6.1 We will not target interventions on properties that have been empty for less than 2 years because these properties are more likely to be empty for normal void reasons and would become re-occupied without further targeted intervention.

6.2 We will target intervention on properties which have been empty between 2 to 5 years as this should make the best use of our resources at the current time. This will give a manageable number of properties to target which are unlikely to be empty due to normal void reasons.

6.3 We will not target intervention on properties that have been empty for over five years because they are likely to need the most work and resources to bring them back into use. We will still aim to bring the number of these properties down, however, as these properties are resource intensive it is unlikely that progress will be made without dedicated staff resource.

7.0 Identification and Engagement

7.1 When we receive a report of an empty home or when we analyse our data to identify long-term empty homes, we will assess that property using the Local impact assessment (see 7.2 below).

7.2 Local impact assessment:

		Score
Are any openings boarded up?	None	0
	Up to 33% of openings	1
	Up to 66% of openings	2
	Over 66% of openings	3
Is dwelling in disrepair?	No	0
	Slight	1
	Serious	2
	Severe	3
Is land overgrown?	No	0
	Slight	1
	Serious	2
	Severe	3
Is there fly-tipping?	No	0
	Small amount	1
	Large amount	2
	Statutory nuisance	3
Evidence of statutory nuisance (premises) or anti-social behaviour?	No nuisance	0
	Anti-social behaviour	1
	Nuisance to adjacent property	2
	Both statutory nuisance and anti-social behaviour	3
How long has the home been empty?	Less than 1 year	0
	1 – 2 years	1
	2 – 5 years	2
	5+ years	3
Total score		

7.3 We will engage with the owners of the empty home to determine why the property is empty and to discover their intentions with the property.

7.4 Where we find that the property is now occupied, we will inform the Council Tax Department so records can be updated.

8.0 Advice and Incentives

8.1 We will:

- Provide advice on the steps involved in becoming a private landlord.
- Offer guidance on the repairs or improvements needed to meet the required standards for private rented properties.
- Refer owners of empty homes to the **No Use Empty Scheme**, where appropriate, to help them access available loans.
- Provide advice on accessing our **HomeFinder** or **Leasing Scheme**, which match prospective tenants with private rented accommodation.
- Consider purchasing an empty home if it is in a suitable condition, offers good value, and provides useful accommodation or development opportunities.

9.0 Enforcement action

9.1 Where giving advice or incentives has not helped to bring the property back into use, we will initiate enforcement action to reduce the negative impact that the empty property has.

9.2 Where we take enforcement action, it will be proportionate to the individual circumstances of the case and will contribute to the overall aim of either returning the property back into use or reducing the negative impact that the property poses to the locality.

9.3 Enforcement action will be based on a risk assessment methodology (see 7.2 Local impact assessment). Enforcement action will be taken on properties which negatively affect the local area or are higher risk. For example, a score of 2 or more on any question is indicative of higher risk.

9.4 Actions range from serving notices requiring entry to the property, improving the condition of the property or land, and requiring repairs to be carried out, through to considering more serious steps such as using an Empty Dwelling Management Order, demolition, or compulsory purchase powers.

9.5 We will recover all reasonable costs incurred in taking the enforcement action, and this will result in a legal charge being placed on the property to recover costs and interest accrued since the action was taken.

9.6 We will enforce the sale of the empty property where significant debts are owed to the Council, for instance following enforcement action.

10.0 Procedure summary

Investigate report of an empty property		
Empty status confirmed		
Local impact assessment completed		
Low risk of impact	High risk of impact	
Letter and advice sent	Letter and advice sent stating action required	
Positive response	Positive response	Unsatisfactory or no response
Monitor progress	Monitor progress	Enforcement action instigated
Home returned to use	Home returned to use	Monitor progress and seek proposals to return empty property to use
	Positive response	Unsatisfactory or no response
	Monitor progress	Consider and undertake further enforcement action
	Home returned to use	EDMO / CPO / Works in Default / Enforced Sale
	Monitor progress	Legal action completed
	Home returned to use	Home returned to use

11.0 Further advice

11.1 If you would like further advice or clarification on this policy, please contact Housing Standards, Maidstone Borough Council, King Street, Maidstone, ME15 6JQ or housingstandards@maidstone.gov.uk

